

**SUMMARY OF THE
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
JUNE 26, 2000**

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Monday, June 26, 2000, at 1:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) as part of the Sixth NELAC Annual Meeting in Williamsburg, VA. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister of the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to review proposed changes to the NELAC Standard and discuss related issues.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Burmeister began the meeting by introducing herself and asked other committee members to do the same. Following introductions, Dr. Bill Gutknecht reviewed the ground rules for the meeting. Handouts included: Additional Proposed Changes to NELAC Chapter 2 Proficiency Testing for “Changes to the Changes” Document and an Errata Sheet for the NELAC PT Fields of Testing (June 2000).

CHAPTER 2

Ms. Cindy Nettrour reviewed changes to Chapter 2. Section 2.0 (Interim Standard) was to be removed. However, participants commented that until accreditation is available for all fields of testing, Section 2.0 cannot be removed. Section 2.0 is necessary because it allows the states to accept PT results from non-accredited providers for those fields of testing not covered by a NELAP Proficiency Testing Oversight Board (PTOB)/Proficiency Testing Provider Accreditor (PTPA). The committee agreed to keep a modified version of the third paragraph from Section 2.0, and delete the first two paragraphs. It will now read:

“For fields of testing for which proficiency testing (PT) samples are not available from a NELAP Proficiency Testing Oversight Body (PTOB)/Proficiency Test Provider Accreditor (PTPA) (e.g., National Institute of Standards and Technology) a Primary Accrediting Authority may accept PT results from non-accredited PT Providers. In these cases, the Secondary Accrediting Authority shall accept the decision of the Primary Accrediting Authority.”

Two options were presented for Section 2.1.3. Changes to this section are dependent on whether or not Chapter 1 adds “matrix” to fields of accreditation. If not, then Chapter 2 will be modified to add “method.”

Several participants expressed concern that the PT Committee was considering changing to accreditation by program/method/analyte. One major consideration for the laboratories was the additional cost of PT samples. A participant said that it would force laboratories to specialize because analysis by multiple methods would cost too much. This would limit their ability to service their clients.

The scope of accreditation issue will be discussed further in a special joint session on June 27, 2000, between the Regulatory Coordination, Program Policy and Structure, Proficiency Testing, and Accrediting Authority Committees. Ms. Burmeister encouraged participants to attend.

Other changes include:

- Text was added to Section 2.2 to describe the responsibilities of the Proficiency Testing Committee.
- Section 2.2.2 was revised for consistency with Chapter 1.
- A new Section 2.3.1 was added for “PT Provider Accreditation.” Section 2.3.2 (previously Section 2.3.1) was reinserted because it was incorrectly deleted in the version posted on the web. The remaining sections under 2.3 were renumbered accordingly (2.3.3 through 2.3.8).
- Text was added to Section 2.7.2 to specify a time frame for completion of PT studies from the initial application date for laboratory accreditation.
- Section 2.7.3 was modified to clarify the time frame for supplemental studies.

APPENDICES A-E

Mr. Matt Caruso reviewed Appendices A-E. A participant requested that Section A.8 be expanded to better explain what actions should be taken for complaints and corrective actions. No changes were proposed for Appendix A (PT Provider Approval Criteria) at this time.

Changes to Appendix B (PT Sample Design & Acceptance Guidelines) include:

- Section B.1.2 on PT sample composition was expanded.
- Sections B.1.3 (PT Sample Matrix) and B.1.4 (PT Sample Composition for Solid Matrices) were added.
- Proposed revisions to Sections B.2.2 and B.4 will be removed.

Changes in Appendix C (PT Acceptance Criteria and PT Pass/Fail Criteria) include:

- Language about bimodal or multimodal distributions was added to Section C.4.
- Language about additional matrix or analyte groups was added to C.4.1.

There was a question about the proposed change to Section C.4 regarding bimodal and multimodal distributions. A bimodal distribution can occur for samples with homogeneity or stability problems. It will be up to the provider to determine whether to use this data. If a PT provider has a small population of data and a laboratory uses a rigorous analysis method, it is possible for them to have a high recovery and fail the PT sample. All the provider can do is explain why the laboratory failed. No changes were made to the standard as a result of this discussion. Text was also added to C.4.1 to specify a time frame for analysis of PT samples after additional analytes are added to the PT field of testing.

In Appendix D (Proficiency Testing Oversight Body/Proficiency Test Provider Accreditor), language was added to the end of Section D.0 to allow the PT Committee to nominate organizations to the NELAC Board of Directors to be designated as a NELAP PTOB/PTPA.

A change was proposed for Appendix E, Section E.3.2 (Microbiology) for consistency in acceptance limits for quantitative analysis of the EPA National Standards.

APPENDIX F

Dr. Faust Parker reviewed changes to Appendix F. Text from Section F.0 was moved to Section F.4.1 and all subsequent sections were renumbered.

APPENDIX G

Mr. Chuck Wibby reviewed Appendix G (Radiochemistry) which is a new appendix being proposed for vote at this meeting.

APPENDIX H

Ms. Lara Autry reviewed Appendix H (Field Air Measurements). An outline was introduced at the NELAC annual meeting two years ago (NELAC IV). She said that the NELAC PT standards for air are taken from the EPA standards. The field activities standards are still under development and until those standards are finalized, this is basically a place holder. A change was proposed to Section H.0 to reference the field activities standards in addition to the QS standard.

Participants complimented Ms. Autry on the work done to date and offered their support, however, they voiced concern that once a standard is set, accrediting authorities (AAS) will rush into implementing them. They asked the committee to issue a warning not to implement the air standards before the field activities standards are final and that the PT standards for air should not be used for accreditation before a full set of standards are in place.

FIELDS OF TESTING ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA

Mr. Wibby reviewed changes to the fields of testing tables. Comments received about the acceptance criteria tables that were posted on the NELAC Website have resulted in data and spelling corrections. Analyte numbers have been added for all analytes. Some data errors included, for example, lower acceptance limits that were higher than the upper limits due to concentration ranges that were too low. These have been corrected so that the acceptance limits are fair and supportable. An errata sheet was distributed to participants and will be available on the website.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Ms. Marykay Steinman introduced the changes to the FAQs and the “Proficiency Testing and Evaluation Process” flowchart. Both were included in the participant packets. No questions or discussion followed.

STANDARDIZED REPORTING

There were several requests for a standardized reporting format for data sent to the AAS. A uniform format has been designated for the national data sent to EPA, but not for the NELAC parameters. Providers are supposed to comply with the required format specified by the AAS. However, different providers have different ways of reporting. A participant who was a provider also indicated that it was difficult to report in all the different formats required by the states. There was also question about how a laboratory reports back to a provider. It was general consensus that a uniform reporting format would be helpful to the providers and laboratories alike.

Another participant stated that he receives corrections from laboratories, corrections to the corrections, and mislabeled laboratory IDs. This occurs with multiple providers. He said that uniform reporting may resolve many of these problems.

Mr. Larry Jackson said that the committee plans to form a working group of stakeholders including accrediting authorities, providers, and laboratories for standardization issues. Some of these issues are: electronic reporting, paper reporting, how to report non-detects, zero values, and false positives. About 18-20 participants indicated an interest in attending a face-to-face meeting about these issues. Mr. Jackson asked participants to e-mail him if they had comments or an interest in addressing these issues.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ms. Burmeister thanked participants and encouraged attendance at the joint meeting to be held on June 27, 2000.

**ACTION ITEMS
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
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Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Mr. Larry Jackson will lead the development of forming a standardization workgroup.	
2.	The PT FOT Errata sheet and corrected tables will be posted on the NELAC Website.	

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PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
JUNE 26, 2000**

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